

**TESTIMONY OF**

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**FOR THE**

**MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

**“Sexual Exploitation Online”**

**October 19, 2010**

Attorney General Coakley, I welcome this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the sexual exploitation of children via classified websites. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) is very concerned about the use of the Internet for domestic minor sex trafficking and thanks you for bringing attention to this serious problem.

As you know, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children is a not-for-profit corporation, mandated by Congress and working in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice. NCMEC is a public-private partnership, funded in part by Congress and in part by the private sector. For 26 years NCMEC has operated under Congressional mandate to serve as the national resource center and clearinghouse on missing and exploited children. This statutory mandate (see 42 U.S.C. §5773) includes 19 specific operational functions, among which are:

- operating a national 24-hour toll-free hotline, 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678), to intake reports of missing children and receive leads about ongoing cases;
- operating the CyberTipline, the “9-1-1 for the Internet,” that the public and electronic service providers may use to report Internet-related child sexual exploitation;
- providing technical assistance and training to individuals and law enforcement agencies in the prevention, investigation, prosecution, and treatment of cases involving missing and exploited children;
- tracking the incidence of attempted child abductions;
- providing forensic technical assistance to law enforcement;
- facilitating the deployment of the National Emergency Child Locator Center during periods of national disasters;
- working with law enforcement and the private sector to reduce the distribution of child pornography over the Internet;
- operating a child victim identification program to assist law enforcement in identifying victims of child pornography;

- developing and disseminating programs and information about Internet safety and the prevention of child abduction and sexual exploitation; and
- providing technical assistance and training to law enforcement in identifying and locating non-compliant sex offenders.

The CyberTipline is the national clearinghouse for leads and tips regarding child sexual exploitation crimes. It is operated in partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”), the Department of Homeland Security’s Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”), the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces (“ICAC”), the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, as well as other state and local law enforcement. We receive reports in eight categories of crimes against children:

- possession, manufacture and distribution of child pornography;
- online enticement of children for sexual acts;
- child prostitution;
- sex tourism involving children;
- extrafamilial child sexual molestation;
- unsolicited obscene material sent to a child;
- misleading domain names; and
- misleading words or digital images on the Internet.

These reports are made by both the public and by Electronic Service Providers, who are required by law to report apparent child pornography to law enforcement via the CyberTipline. The leads are reviewed by NCMEC analysts, who examine and evaluate the content, add related information that would be useful to law enforcement, use publicly-available search tools to determine the geographic location of the apparent criminal act, and provide all information to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation. These reports are also triaged to ensure that children in imminent danger get first priority.

The FBI, ICE and Postal Inspection Service have direct and immediate access to all CyberTipline reports, and assign agents and analysts to work at NCMEC. In the 12 years since the CyberTipline began, NCMEC has received and processed more than 957,000 reports. To date, electronic service providers have reported to the CyberTipline more than 7.8 million images/videos of sexually exploited children. To date, more than 39 million child pornography images and videos have been reviewed by the analysts in our Child Victim Identification Program, which assists prosecutors to secure convictions for crimes involving identified child victims and helps law enforcement to locate and rescue child victims who have not yet been identified.

When they hear the term “child trafficking,” most Americans think that it only happens somewhere else, in Southeast Asia or Central America. Even if they acknowledge that this crime happens in the United States, they assume the victims are foreign children brought into this country who are trafficked only in large cities.

In fact, we have learned that most of the victims of domestic minor sex trafficking are American kids who initially leave home voluntarily and are being trafficked on Main Street USA. As law enforcement knows, the only way not to find this problem in any community is simply not to look for it. The good news is that America has begun to look.

Although it is difficult to quantify the scope of this problem with accuracy, data from the most recent studies by the University of Pennsylvania and the U.S. Department of Justice indicates that between 100,000 and 300,000 American children are at risk of becoming victims of domestic minor sex trafficking each year.<sup>1</sup> How old are these victims? For girls, the entry age is just 12-14; most boys enter this insidious world at age 11-13. Where is it happening? Child prostitution rings have been dismantled in Harrisburg,

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<http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/restes/CSEC.htm>;

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/nismart/04/>

Pennsylvania and Braintree, Massachusetts, as well as New York, Miami and Washington, D.C.

What else have we learned about this problem?

- Child sex trafficking is organized crime; and
- The children involved are victims.

These children are treated as commodities for sale by an often-sophisticated criminal network. They are trafficked, moved from city to city for the financial gain of those who use, abuse and control them. Earlier this year a federal grand jury in New York indicted members of the Gambino crime family for selling kids for sex who were advertised on the Internet. The relatively low risk and high profit draws not just highly organized criminal enterprises but also attracts smaller and less sophisticated operations.

These children are victims of 21<sup>st</sup> century slavery. They lack the ability to walk away. The pimps who use them are the criminals, as are those who purchase them. These children need to be rescued, not arrested. We are encouraged by the recent passage of Safe Harbor laws in some states, mandating that these children be treated as victims. We are hopeful that other states will follow suit.

While it is true that this problem is one of sexual exploitation, it begins because these children are missing --- runaway or throwaway children, many of whom are in the child welfare system, in the care of the states. Many of them are not reported to law enforcement. Even if they are reported missing, some law enforcement agencies are not entering them promptly into the FBI's National Crime Information Center database (NCIC) and, in many cases, not entering them at all.

Years ago, many law enforcement officers presumed that a runaway child would come home on his own. Parents were told to wait a day or two to see if their child turned up before police would take the report. Today, child advocacy groups estimate that as many

as one-third of teen runaways/throwaways become involved in prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home.

Federal law requires state and local law enforcement to enter missing children into NCIC within 2 hours of receiving the report. Yet, research has shown that this procedure not implemented consistently, due in part to the fact that law enforcement is faced with approximately 600,000 NCIC entries of runaway children every year. Of the missing child cases reported to NCMEC, 78% are what we call “Endangered Runaways.” These children are at the highest risk of being sexually exploited or trafficked for sex. Of the child prostitution reports made to the CyberTipline, more than 1,700 involve known missing children being prostituted. There must be comprehensive, widely-available law enforcement training in how to recognize high-risk victims and respond effectively. Among the free training that NCMEC provides to law enforcement is our Protecting Victims of Child Prostitution course. Officials from Massachusetts have attended this course, including officers from the New Bedford Police Department and the Boston Police Department and prosecutors from the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office.

Pimps have always preyed upon runaway and throwaway children, but the Internet has dramatically changed their business model. Offenders don’t just parade these children on city streets any more. Today, a “customer” can shop online for a child from the privacy of his home or hotel room. Online classified ads make it possible to sell these children to customers with little risk.

Let me give you an example. In July 2010 a Maryland mother found a photo of her runaway daughter in a sex ad on multiple online classifieds sites. She contacted NCMEC. Working with the Maryland State Police and the FBI, the girl was recovered and is getting help. The pimp was arrested. The child in the ad looked young. Yet, no company reported it. There are many other examples. We need the help and vigilance of the general public and of these companies to help law enforcement

Some classified ad websites cooperate with law enforcement in investigations. However, this is not eliminating the problem. These ads must not be posted to begin with.

So how can these classified ad sites determine whether or not to post an ad? They can review the ads and photos to identify words and terms known to be used in child prostitution. Of course, these key words are possible indicators, not proof, of criminal activity. Until law enforcement is given the information necessary to open an investigation, these children will continue to suffer as hidden victims.

In addition, NCMEC encourages the public and all classified ad websites to report these suspicious ads to the CyberTipline. Once an ad is reported to [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com), NCMEC refers it to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation. The message is simple: If you see it, know about it, or suspect it -- report it.

Of course, if we crack down on child sex trafficking in one area of the Internet, some of it will migrate to other areas. Recently Craigslist shut down its “Adult Services” section in the United States. General Coakley, we thank you for your vigorous efforts that led to this positive step. However, runaway/throwaway children are still being sold for sex on other classified ad sites. Like the pursuit of other kinds of criminal behavior, law enforcement will follow it wherever it goes. The goal is to destroy the business model for those who sell children for sex.

In 2003 the U.S. Department of Justice recognized that this problem requires multi-disciplinary, multi-jurisdictional, and multi-agency partnerships. The FBI and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Child Exploitation & Obscenity Section (CEOS) launched the Innocence Lost National Initiative. NCMEC is proud to be a partner in this 7-year-old effort to attack the problem of child sex trafficking.

This initiative spurred the creation 38 dedicated task forces and working groups throughout the U.S., involving federal, state and local law enforcement agencies -- including the task force in Boston. Combining the strength of multiple agencies with the

U.S. Attorneys' offices, more than 1,100 child victims have been rescued. More than 600 pimps have been convicted, and, for the first time, many are getting serious sentences from the courts. Four were sentenced to life in prison, and many others were sentenced to 20-plus years.

However, many of the children rescued by Innocence Lost had no place to go to get help. We must provide needed services for the victims who are rescued. They must be given the tools necessary to prevent them from returning to a pimp. Long-term shelters and residential treatment programs lack sufficient resources. Currently there are only 50 beds available in the United States for the long-term treatment of these victims.

In closing, I would like to make the following recommendations:

- Law enforcement should receive training in the NCIC entry of missing children and identifying high-risk victims.
- States should reaffirm that child sex trafficking is not a victimless crime, and should enact laws ensuring that these children are treated as victims and not perpetrators.
- States should expand resources and services available for the victims. There are some extraordinary programs doing heroic work, but there aren't enough of them and the ones that exist receive insufficient funding.
- Challenge everyone to report child prostitution in their communities. The message is simple: If you see it in your city, or if you know about it, or if you suspect it, report it.

Thank you for bringing attention to this problem. NCMEC stands ready to provide any assistance that we can.